# The Tongue is a Pen: Robert Grosseteste's *Dictum 54* and Scribal Technology

by Joseph Goering and Randall Rosenfeld

Before Robert Grosseteste became bishop of Lincoln, an office he held from 1235 to 1253, he spent some five years as the first theological lector to the Franciscan friars in Oxford.[1] Thomas Eccleston, the thirteenth-century chronicler of the origins of the Franciscan Order in England, tells how the first friars to arrive in Oxford in 1224 "were so keen to attend theological lectures and to perform scholastic exercises, that they did not hesitate to go daily to the schools of theology, however distant, barefoot, in bitter cold and deep mud."[2] Agnellus of Pisa (ca. 1194–1236), the first provincial minister of the English province of the Franciscans, came to their aid. According to Eccleston, he "caused a school of fair dimensions to be built in the place of the brethren, and persuaded Master Robert Grosseteste of holy memory to lecture there to the brethren."[3] The school building was completed in 1229–1230, and from this time until his elevation to the see of Lincoln

[1] For the life and writings of Robert Grosseteste, see James McEvoy, *Robert Grosseteste* (Oxford, 2000); Richard W. Southern, *Robert Grosseteste: The Growth of an English Mind in Medieval Europe* (Oxford, 1986); James McEvoy, *The Philosophy of Robert Grosseteste* (Oxford, 1982); *Robert Grosseteste: Scholar and Bishop*, ed. Daniel A. Callus (Oxford, 1955); S. Harrison Thomson, *The Writings of Robert Grosseteste, Bishop of Lincoln 1235–1253* (Cambridge, 1940).

[2] "Licet autem fratres summae simplicitati et conscientiae puritati summopere studerent in omnibus, in audienda tamen lege divina et scholasticis exercitiis ita fuerunt ferventes, ut scholas theologiae, quantumcumque distarent, adire quotidie nudis pedibus in frigoris asperitate et luti profunditate non pigritarentur," *Fratris Thomae vulgo dicti de Eccleston Tractatus de adventu Fratrum Minorum in Angliam*, ed. A.G. Little (Manchester, 1951), p. 27 (c. 6); see Daniel A. Callus, "Robert Grosseteste as Scholar," in *Robert Grosseteste: Scholar and Bishop* (as in n. 1), pp. 1–69, at 10.

[3] "Ampliato loco, ubi principale studium florebat in Anglia [i.e. Oxford], et ubi universitas scholarium convenire consuevit, fecit frater Agnellus scholam satis honestam aedificari in loco fratrum, et impetravit a sanctae memoriae magistro Roberto Grosseteste, ut legeret ibi fratribus," Eccleston, *De adventu* (as in n. 2), p. 48 (c. 11); Callus, "Robert Grosseteste as Scholar (as in n. 2)," p. 10.

Grosseteste taught the Franciscans there. "Under him," Eccleston reports, "within a short time they made incalculable progress both in scholastic disputations and in subtle moralities suitable for preaching."[4]

We are fortunate to have some surviving evidence of Grosseteste's teaching in this period. Sometime after he became bishop, Grosseteste collected together a number of *dicta* from his scholastic lectures, and some sermons, and published these together in a volume. A *recapitulacio* appended to many of the forty-odd surviving manuscripts of the *Dicta* gives precise information about the text:

> In this book are 147 chapters, some of which are brief notes that I wrote down sketchily while I was in the schools, to assist my memory. They deal with different subjects and are not continuous, and I have supplied titles for them so that the reader will be able to find more easily what he wants in them. The titles therefore sometimes promise more to the reader than they deliver. Some of the chapters, however, are sermons that I preached at the same time, either to the clergy or to the people.[5]

Reading the *Dicta*, one can readily see what Thomas Eccleston meant when he said that the Friars "made incalculable progress ... in subtle moralities suitable for preaching" under Grosseteste's tutelage. Many of the *Dicta* are built around a single word or thing in Scripture, most often from the Psalms,[6] which is then interpreted according to its "moral" meaning, that is, how its spiritual interpretation teaches something universal about the

[4] "Sub quo inaestimabiliter infra breve tempus tam in quaestionibus quam praedicationi congruis subtilibus moralitatibus profecerunt," Eccleston, *De adventu*, p. 48 (c. 11) (as in n. 2); Callus, "Robert Grosseteste as Scholar" (as in n. 2), pp. 10–11.

[5] "In hoc libello sunt 147 capitula quorum quedam sunt brevia verba que dum in scolis morabar scripsi breviter et in composito sermone ad memoriam; nec sunt de una materia nec adinvicem continuata, quorum titulos posui ut facilius quod vellet lector posset invenire. Spondent itaque plerumque plus aliqui tituli quam solvant capitula lectori. Quedam vero sunt sermones quas eodem tempore ad clerum vel ad populum feci," printed in Thomson, *Writings* (as in n. 1), p. 214. Only a few of the *dicta* have been printed; see Thomson, *Writings*, pp. 214–32; McEvoy, *Philosophy of Robert Grosseteste* (as in n. 1), pp. 499–500. A few have been translated into English by Gordon Jackson, *Dicta Lincolniensis: A Selection of the Dicta theologica of Robert Grosseteste* (Lincoln, UK, 1972). A working text is gradually being made available on the Robert Grosseteste website, www.grosseteste.com.

[6] Grosseteste was lecturing on the Psalms to the Friars at the same time, and many of his *Dicta* appear also in his commentary on the Psalter; see Thomson, *Writings* (as in n. 1), pp. 75–76, 214. The Psalms commentary is being edited by James Ginther, Joseph Goering, and Elizabeth Streitz-Guez.

human person and the soul. Such an interpretation is the basis of *Dictum* 54. Beginning with the Vulgate text of Ps. 44.2: "Lingua mea calamus scribae velociter scribentis," Grosseteste develops a sophisticated "morality" that begins by studying the nature of the pen and the tongue respectively, and finds in these physical things a spiritual meaning about the virtues and vices – the habits of the Christian soul.

Like all orthodox interpreters of the sacred texts, Grosseteste begins with the literal meaning of the thing described in Scripture, and moves from that to the spiritual meaning.[7] His understanding of how one should appreciate the literal sense of Scripture is informed by his scientific training. Like many of his contemporaries in the schools, Grosseteste is confident that the better one understands the thing itself that is described in Scripture (in this case the pen and the tongue), the better one can discover the spiritual meanings, whether allegorical or moral, that are intended by God, the author of the text.[8]

This insistence on careful physical description and analysis offers the modern reader many unanticipated delights, in addition to moral instruction. In *Dictum* 54, for example, it provides us with one of the earliest detailed descriptions of how a medieval scribe would prepare a pen for writing, and with a subtle psychological analysis of the formation of human speech. An exposition of these themes will be found below. The Latin text of the *dictum* will also serve, as it did for the original audience of Franciscan students in the Oxford *studium*, to exercise the reader or listener in the language and

[7] The *locus classicus* describing this fundamental rule of Biblical interpretation is Thomas Aquinas's discussion in the *Prima pars* of his *Summa theologiae* (ca. 1265). Article 10 of the *Summa's* first question is entitled by modern editors "Utrum sacra Scriptura sub una littera habeat plures sensus." There Thomas sets out the common teaching. In his response to the first objection, that a multiplicity of senses in one text would lead to confusion and deception, Thomas replies: "No confusion follows from the multiplicity of senses in sacred Scripture, because all the senses are founded on one sense, namely the literal," *Summa theologiae* 1.1.10 ad 1m.

[8] See Joseph Goering, "The De dotibus of Robert Grosseteste," *Mediaeval Studies* 44 (1982), 83–109, at pp. 83–90, for an example of the ways that Grosseteste and his contemporaries brought the latest scientific and juridical knowledge of the schools to bear on the literal understanding of *dotes* (wedding gifts) in order better to understand the allegorical meaning of these as wedding gifts given by Christ, the spouse, to Christian souls in heaven. For an *ex professo* discussion of Grosseteste's "spiritual" interpretation of the Biblical text in its allegorical, moral, and anagogical senses, see *Robert Grosseteste, Hexaemeron*, ed. Richard C. Dales and Servus Gieben, Auctores Britannici Medii Aevi 6 (London, 1982), pp. 52 (1, 2, 1–2), and 68 (1, 12, 2–4). Examples of spiritual interpretation follow his literal exposition of the creation narrative in Genesis, e.g. pp. 78–79 (1, 19, 1), 96–97 (2, 9, 1–5), 112–16 (3, 14, 1–14 = *allegorice*), and 116–17 (3, 15, 1–4 = *moraliter*).

vocabulary of scholastic preaching and teaching in the thirteenth century schools.

## Text

The text of Dictum 54 printed here is transcribed from MS Bodley 798 in the Bodleian Library, Oxford (= **B**). This manuscript was chosen, in the absence of a complete collation and evaluation of all the extant manuscripts, because of its (relatively) early date, and because it offers a careful and clean scribal copy. All other manuscripts consulted contain more numerous scribal errors and obvious misreadings. The orthography of **B** has been retained. Capitalization, punctuation, and paragraph divisions follow modern conventions. The text of Bodley 798 was collated with six other manuscripts (listed below), and emended slightly on the basis of the collation. An *apparatus criticus*, keyed to the text by means of footnotes, reports the readings of all the manuscripts listed below wherever an emendation has been introduced into the text of **B**. Biblical and other source references are printed in square brackets within the text. The following manuscripts have been consulted:

**B** = Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS 798, saec. XIV, [base text] fols. 42vb–43vb
**C** = Cambridge, Trinity College Library, MS B.15.20 (356), saec. XIV, fols. 32rb–33ra
**E** = Eton College Library, MS 8, saec. XIV, fol. 26rb–vb (Grosseteste, *Super Psalmos*: Ps. 44:2),
**L** = Lincoln Cathedral, Library, MS 188, saec. XIV, fols. 55rb–56rb
**M** = Lincoln Cathedral, Library, MS 202, saec. XIV, fols. 60rb–61rb
**R** = London, British Library, MS Royal 6.E.V, saec. XIV, fols. 28ra–vb
**X** = Oxford, Exeter College, MS 21, pp. 8b–10b, saec. XV

Dictum 54

1 Lingua <hominis>[1] sapientis calamus est scribentis, sicut ait Psalmista: "Lingua mea calamus scribe uelociter scribentis." [Ps. 44.2] Hic calamus cauatur per humilitatem. Unde Thobie 4o: "Superbiam in tuo sensu et tuo uerbo numquam dominari permittas." [Tob. 4.14] Hic calamus circumcidi debet, ita ut a parte dextera tollatur ociositas, scurilitas, et temeritas. A parte sinistra tollatur falsitas, immundicia, detraccionis acerbitas. Findi debet discretione, incurtari a tediosa prolixitate, subtiliari ipsius breuiloquii luciditate. Rigidus sit, nec plicet se bilingui dupplicitate, nec nimis sit mollis palpante adulacione.

2 Acies uero sic calamum curcumcidens et ad scribendum habilitans timor est penarum uicia lingue sequencium. Ociositatem itaque abscindit Mattheus 12o, cum dicit: "Omne uerbum otiosum quod loquti fuerint homines reddent racionem de eo in die iudicii." [Matt. 12.36] Scurilitatem et temeritatem et sermonis inmundiciam uoluit Paulus abscindere cum dicit ad Ephesios 5o: "Fornicacio" etc. "et omnis inmundicia aut auaricia non nominetur in uobis, sicut decet sanctos, aut turpitudo, aut stultiloquium, aut scurilitas, que ad rem non pertinet." [Eph. 5.3–4] Temeritatem etiam abscindit Ecclesiastico 9o:[2] "Temerarius in /43ra/ uerbo suo odibilis erit." [Eccus. 9.25] Falsitatem abscindit liber Sapiencie primo, cum dicit: "Os quod mentitur occidit animam." [Sap. 1.11] Et Psalmus: "Perdes omnes qui loquntur mendacium." [Ps. 5.7] Detraccionem tollit Paulus, cum dicit: "Detractores Deo odibiles," [Rom. 1.30] et Iacobus 4o: "Nolite detrahere alterutrum fratres, quoniam qui detrahit fratri detrahit legi." [Iac. 4.11]

3 Discrecione findit hunc calamum Salamon, cum ait in Prouerbiis 13: "Qui inconsideratus est ad loquendum senciet mala," [Prov. 13.3] quasi diceret loquelam precedet consideracio et discrecio. Et iterum idem: "Os iustorum parturit sapienciam," [Prov. 10.31] quia premeditando cum discrecione parit.

4 Multiloquii prolixitatem incurtat Salomon in Parabolis 10: "In multiloquio non deerit peccatum." [Prov. 10.19] Et Dominus ipse in Mattheo sexto: "Orantes nolite multum loqui." [Matt. 6.7]

[1] hominis **CELMRX**: *om.* **B**
[2] 9o **CELMRX**: quo **B**

**Translation**

Dictum 54

1 The tongue of the wise man is the pen of the writer, as the Psalmist says: "My tongue is the pen of the scribe writing quickly." [Ps. 44.2] This pen is made hollow through humility. Whence Tobias states in the fourth chapter: "Never allow pride to master your sense or your word." [Tob. 4.14] This pen ought to be trimmed, so that idleness, scurrility, and rashness are removed from the right part, while deceitfulness, impurity, and the bitterness of slander are removed from the left part. It ought to be split with discretion, shortened from tiresome prolixity, and made keen by the lucidity of brevity itself. It must be rigid, neither twisting in the duplicity of its double tongue, nor excessively soft in stroking flattery.

2 The sharp edge trimming the pen and making it fit for writing is the fear of punishments ensuing from vices of the tongue. It cuts away idleness, as Matthew says in chapter twelve: "Every idle word such as men are wont to speak, they shall render an account for it on the day of judgement." [Matt. 12.36] Paul wished to cut away scurrility, rashness, and impurity of speech when he said to the Ephesians in the fifth chapter: "Let not fornication ... and all impurity or covetousness be named among you, as befits the saints, or obscenity or foolish discourse, or scurrility, which is to no purpose." [Eph. 5.3–4] Ecclesiasticus also cuts away rashness, when he says "he who is rash in his speech will be hateful." [Eccus. 9.25] The first chapter of Wisdom cuts away deceitfulness, when it says: "The mouth that lies kills the soul." [Sap. 1.11] And the Psalm says: "You will ruin all who speak lies." [Ps. 5.7] Paul removes slander, when he says: "Slanderers are hateful to God," [Rom. 1.30] and James in the fourth chapter writes: "Brothers, do not slander each other, since he who slanders his brother slanders the Law." [Iac. 4.11]

3 Solomon splits this pen with discretion when he says in Proverbs, chapter thirteen: "He who is thoughtless will encounter evils," [Prov. 13.3] as if to say that reflection and discretion should precede discourse. And the same writer again: "The mouth of the just shall bring forth wisdom," [Prov. 10.31] since in deliberating with discretion one brings forth [wise speech].

4 Solomon shortens the prolixity of loquaciousness in Parables chapter ten: "Sin fails not in loquaciousness." [Prov. 10.19] And the Lord himself in Matthew, chapter six: "When you are praying speak not much." [Matt. 6.7]

5 Luciditatem sermonis uoluit Paulus cum dixit, ad Ephesios ultimo: "Ut detur mihi sermo in apercione[3] oris mei," [Eph. 6.19] et ad Colossenses 4o: "Orantes ut Dominus aperiat nobis ostium sermonis," [Col. 4.3] et 2 ad Thessalonicenses 3: "Orate pro nobis ut sermo currat et clarificetur." [2 Thess. 3.1] Aperto enim ore loquitur qui uerba habet manifesta et dilucida; clauso ore qui uerba loquitur obscura. Sic Dominus aperiens os suum doctrine luciditate docebat.

6 Rigorem autem ne plicet se bilingui duplicitate incutit Salomon in Parabolis 8, cum dicit: "Et os bilingue detestor."[4] [Prov. 8.13] Molliciem palpitantis adulacionis tollit Ezechiel cum dicit: "Ve qui consuunt puluillos sub omni cubito manus, et faciunt ceruicalia sub capite uniuerse etatis." [Ez. 13.18]

7 Calamus autem iste nil obscurum strepat susurrando aut murmurando, sicut monet Sapiencia primo: "Custodite uos a murmuracione, que nichil prodest, et a detraccione parcite lingue, quoniam sermo obscurus in uacuum non ibit." [Sap. 1.11] Non nimis precipitanter discurrat precipitata uelocitate, unde Iacobus: "Sit omnis homo uelox ad audiendum," etc. [Iac. 1.19] Non inhereant huic calamo pili mundanorum [*sic*] superfluitatum que lituram[5] faciant. Hos pilos abstraxit Ioannes in epistola sua canonica prima, 2o: "Nolite diligere mundum," [1 Joan. 2.15] et Iacobo 4: "Amicicia huius mundi inimica[6] est Deo." [Iac. 4.4] Manus autem hoc calamo scribens Verbum Patris est, quod idem est et manus Patris, in qua manu sumus /43rb/ et nos et sermones nostri. Unde in Prouerbiis 10: "Hominis est animum preparare, et Dei gubernare linguam," [Prov. 16.1] quia "linguam nullus hominum domare potest," ut ait Iacobus, 3o, [Iac. 3.8] sed solus Deus, ut ait Augustinus, in cuius manu est. [cf. *Confessiones* 11, 2]

8 Intingi debet hic calamus in puro et summe ueritatis perspicuo fonte, ubi humectetur non attramenti nigredine sed aureo splendore sapiencie. Unde inscribat non literas nigras in pelle mortua, sed literas aureas in mente uiua. Usui alterius calami aptatur pellis mortua; usu huius calami mens mortua fit uiua.

[3] apercione **CELM** *Vulg.*: operacione **BR**: apericione **X**
[4] detestor **CLM** *Vulg.*: detector **BRX**: detestator **E**
[5] lituram **LE**: literam **BCMRX**
[6] inimica **CELMRX** *Vulg.*: inimicia **B**

5 Paul desired lucidity of speech when he asked in the last chapter to the Ephesians: "that speech may be given me in the opening of my mouth," [Eph. 6.19] and in the fourth chapter to the Colossians: "Praying that the Lord may open the door of speech to us," [Col. 4.3] and in the third chapter of the Second Letter to the Thessalonians: "Pray for us, that our speech may be fluent and illustrious." [2 Thess. 3.1] Indeed, he who offers clear and distinct words speaks with an open mouth; while he who offers dark words speaks with a closed mouth. So the Lord, when he opened his mouth, taught with a lucidity of doctrine.

6 Solomon, moreover, in Parables chapter eight, inculcates rigidity, lest the pen twist in its double-tongued duplicity, when he says: "I detest the double-tongued mouth." [Prov. 8.13] Ezechiel eliminates the softness of stroking flattery when he says: "Woe to them that sew cushions under every elbow, and make pillows for the heads of persons of every age." [Ez. 13.18]

7 Let this pen proclaim nothing dark in whispering or murmuring, just as Wisdom admonishes in chapter one: "Guard yourselves from murmuring, which is good for nothing, and refrain your tongue from slander, since dark discourse does not go into the void." [Sap. 1.11] Let the pen not course about in very great haste, at ruinous speed, whence James says: "Let every man be quick to hear [but slow to speak and slow to anger]." [Iac. 1.19] Let the barbs of the excesses of worldly things, which might make a smudge, not remain on this pen. John removed these barbs in his first canonical letter, chapter two: "Do not embrace the world," [1 Joan. 2.15] and James likewise in chapter four: "Friendship of this world is the enemy of God." [Iac. 4.4] The hand that writes with this pen is the Word of the Father, which is the same as the hand of the Father, in which hand we are, both we and our discourse. Whence in Proverbs chapter ten: "The role of man is to ready the soul, and the role of God is to govern the tongue," [Prov. 16.1] since, as James says in chapter three: "No one can conquer the tongue," [Iac. 3.8] save God alone, in whose hand it is, as Augustine says. [cf. *Conf.* 11, 2]

8 The pen ought to be dipped in the pure and transparent well of the highest truth, where it is moistened, not with the blackness of ink, but with the golden lustre of wisdom. Whence it ought not to write black letters on a dead skin, but golden letters on a live mind. Dead skin is fit for the use of another pen, but with this pen a dead mind is made live.

9 Alter calamus pellem cui inscribit a carne non separat. Hic autem calamus et mentem cui inscribit a carne[7] separat, et separatam ut dictum est uiuificat.

10 Solet eciam altero calamo manus scribens pellem cui inscribit sordidare. Hoc autem calamo manus scribens, que ubique attingit propter mundiciam suam, solet cui inscribit mundificare. Debet autem id cui inscribit iste calamus abradi nouacula timoris penarum iehennalium, et postea planari attricione lapidis cauernosi, id est frequenti recordacione Christi uulnerati, quia Christus lapis est per uulneracionem cauernatus. [cf. Act. 4.11; Cant. 2.14] Erit id cui inscribitur molle recepcione et sensibilitate, sed firmum et stabile inscripti retentibilitate. Unde tam tabulis carneis quam tabulis lapideis comparatur: carneis propter sensum et recepcionem, lapideis propter firmam retencionem. Unde in Exodo 31: "Dedit Dominus Moysi lapideas tabulas scriptas utrasque digito Dei." [Ex. 31.18] Ad Corintheos uero ait Apostolus: "Non in tabulis lapideis sed in tabulis cordis carnalibus." [2 Cor. 3.3] Unde Ezechiele 2o: "Auferam cor lapideum," quo ad duriciam recepcionis, "et dabo eis cor carneum," quo ad facilitatem et sensum recepcionis. [Ez. 11.19]

11 Mala autem lingua calamus cauus[8] est per inanitatem uanitatis. "Vana enim loquti sunt unusquisque ad proximum suum." [Ps. 11.3] Et alibi: "Loquti sunt uanitates." [Ps. 37.13] Exuberant autem hinc ociositas, scurilitas, et temeritas, inde falsitas, inmundicia, detraccionis acerbitas. Non est fissus discrecione. Prominet in longum tediosa prolixitate. Nec subtiliatur breuiloquii luciditate. Plicat se bilingui duplicitate. Nimis mollis est palpanti /43va/ adulacione. Obscurum quid strepit susurro et murmure, discurrit precipitata uelocitate, mouetur enim furia aliqua agitante prius intinctus in attramento iehenne, unde et illud cui inscribit dinoscitur incendere.

[7] a carne separat **CELMRX**: a carne non separat **B**
[8] cauus **CELMRX**: *del.* **B**

9 That other pen does not separate the skin on which it writes from the flesh. This pen both separates the mind on which it writes from the flesh and, as was said, restores the separated mind to life.*

10 Moreover, the hand that writes with the other pen is wont to defile the skin on which it writes. But the hand – which touches everywhere on account of its purity – that writes with this pen is wont to make pure what it writes on. That upon which this pen writes [i.e. the mind] ought to be abraded with the razor of the fear of the punishment of Gehenna, and afterwards made smooth by the attrition of a pitted stone [i.e. pumice], that is, by frequent recollection of the wounded Christ, because Christ is the stone pitted through wounding. [cf. Act. 4.11; Cant. 2.14] That which is written upon will be soft for reception and feeling, but also firm and stable for preserving the inscription. Whence it is compared both to tablets of flesh and to tablets of stone; to tablets of flesh according to perception and reception, and to tablets of stone according to stable preservation. Thus in Exodus chapter thirty one: "To Moses the Lord gave stone tablets, both written by the finger of God." [Ex. 31.18] The apostle Paul indeed said to the Corinthians: "[Written] not on stone tablets but on the fleshly tablets of the heart." [2 Cor. 3.3] Whence Ezechiel in the second chapter: "I will take away the heart of stone," with respect to the hardness of preservation, "and I will give them a heart of flesh," with respect to the ease and sensibility of reception. [Ez. 11.19]

11 The evil tongue is a pen hollow through the inanity of vanity: "They have spoken vain things every one to his neighbour." [Ps. 11.3] And elsewhere: "They spoke vain things." [Ps. 37.13] On one side of this pen idleness, scurrility, and rashness abound; on the other deceitfulness, impurity, and the bitterness of slander. It is not split with discretion; in length it extends in tiresome prolixity; nor is it made keen by the lucidity of brevity. It twists in the duplicity of its double tongue, and it is too soft in its stroking flattery. In whispering and murmuring it proclaims that which is dark, it courses about at ruinous speed, moved by some impelling rage, first having been dipped in the ink of Gehenna, whence that on which it writes is seen to burn.

* Cf. "... pergamenum... debet separari a carne per abrenunciationem carnalium desideriorum (... parchment... ought to be separated from the flesh through the renouncing of carnal desires"); *Hugonis cardinalis opera omnia* (as in note 11), 2, fol. 116r.

12 "Lingua enim," ut ait Iacobus 3, "ignis est, inflammata a iehenna, incendens rotam natiuitatis nostre." [Iac. 3.6] "Modicus est quidem ignis, sed magnam siluam incendens." [Iac. 3.5] Unde Ecclesiasticus 20: "Apercio oris eius inflammacio est." [Eccus. 20.15] Inscribit autem tales literas aut superbia turgentes, aut inuidia liuentes, aut ira inflammatas, aut inmundicia lutosas, aut in affectu aliquo prauo infectas et maculatas.

13 Nec solum calamus talis illud cui inscribit conmaculat, sed et ipsius in quo radicatur subuersio est et confusio et ruina. Unde Ecclesiasticus 5o: "Lingua imprudentis subuersio est illius." [Eccus. 5.15] Et in Prouerbiis: "Os stulti confusioni proximum est." [Prov. 10.14] Et iterum Parabolis: "Propter peccata labiorum ruina proximat malo." [Prov. 12.13]

14 Quanta ergo diligencia lingua custodienda est, que et loquentem et auditorem secundum sui disposiciones informat aut deformat; cuius operacio a mentis intimo inchoat et ad mentis intimum penetrat, quia inchoacio operis eius uerbum est interius, quo menti nichil intimius* est, et in uerbo interiori menti audientis inscripto eiusdem operis est consummacio. Per eam inscribitur anime ueritatis pulcritudo, instillatque uite gracie infusio, ac per id ab omni morbo peccati sanacio. Hec est amicicie iocunde multiplicacio, animorum colligacio, secretorum propalacio in cuius ministerio ceteris creaturis precellimus, sine cuius ministerio in tenebris ignorancie obuoluti ceteris uiliores essemus. Unde Salomon in Prouerbiis 10: "Vena uite os iusti." [Prov. 10.11] Et eodem: "Sapientum lingua sanitas." [Prov. 12.18] Et Ecclesiastici 6o: "Verbum dulce multiplicat amicos et mitigat inimicos." [Eccus. 6.5]

15 Adde ad hoc quod in interiori uerbo sumus Dei similitudo; in uerbo autem sonante et significante exteriori est expressiua similitudo verbi incarnati. Quid igitur tam diligenti custodia obseruandum ut uerbum in quo nostra summa consistit dignitas, quod qui custodit, ut patet ex iam dictis,

* "Intimius" is a rarely encountered comparative form based on the more usual superlative form "intimus." It is not, however, a neologism of Grosseteste's invention; cf. Bonaventure, *Breviloquium,* pars 7, cap. 2. Although Bonaventure may have taken the word from reading Grosseteste, it is more likely to have been part of the common vocabulary of saec. XIII[1] and earlier theological discourse. See also Isaac de l'Étoile (= Isaac de Stella, 1110/1120–ca. 1169), *Sermons*, ed. Anselm Hoste and Gaetano Raciti, tr. Gaston Salet and Gaetano Raciti, Sources Chrétiennes 339 (Paris, 1987), *Sermo* 46, p. 122.

12 As James says in chapter three: "The tongue is a fire, lit from Gehenna, inflaming the wheel of our birth"; [Iac. 3.6] "small indeed is the fire, but it burns a great forest." [Iac. 3.5]. Whence Ecclesiasticus chapter twenty: "The opening of his mouth is a conflagration." [Eccus. 20.15] It writes such letters as are swollen with pride, livid with envy, flaming with anger, dirtied with impurity, discoloured and defiled in some perverse affection.

13 Not only does such a pen pollute that on which it writes, but it is the undoing and confusion and ruin of the very thing in which it is rooted. Whence Ecclesiasticus chapter five: "The tongue of the reckless is his own undoing." [Eccus. 5.15] And in Proverbs: "The mouth of the fool is kin to confusion." [Prov. 10.14] And again in Proverbs: "Destruction approaches the evil one through the sins of the lips." [Prov. 12.13]

14 How great, therefore, is the diligence with which the tongue must be guarded, which can form or deform, according to the dispositions of him who speaks and of him who listens; whose workings begin from the inmost recesses of the mind and penetrate to the further inmost recesses of the mind, because the beginning of its work is the interior word, than which nothing is more intimate to the mind, and the completion of that same work is the interior word written on the mind of the listener. Through it the beauty of truth is written on the soul, and it instils the grace of life, and through it the healing of every malady of sin. This is the enlargement of delightful friendship, the partnership of souls, the imparting of secrets in whose service we excel the other creatures, without whose service we would be lower than they in the shadows of enveloping ignorance. Whence Solomon in Proverbs chapter ten: "The mouth of the just is a vein of life." [Prov. 10.11] And in the same place: "The tongue of the wise is health." [Prov. 12.18] And Ecclesiasticus chapter six: "An agreeable word multiplies friends and appeases enemies." [Eccus. 6.5]

15 Add to this that we are like to God in the interior word; in speaking and producing the exterior word, the likeness to the Word incarnate is expressed. What, therefore, ought to be watched with more diligence than the word, in which stands our highest dignity, because he who guards his word guards his soul, as is evident from what has already been stated? Solomon says, in

custodit /43vb/ animam suam. Et sicut ait Salomon, Prouerbiis 12: "Qui custodit os suum custodit animam suam," [Prov. 13.3] in quo "qui non offendit, perfectus est," [Iac. 3.2] sicut ait Iacobus 3. Et in Prouerbiis 14: "Qui moderatur labia sua prudentissimus est." [Prov. 10.19] Et Ecclesiasticus: "Beatus uir qui non est lapsus uerbo ex ore suo." [Eccus. 14.1] Cum enim uerbi nomen aglutinet simul uerbum interius cum exteriori, uerbumque interius omnis operis sit principium, patet quod qui non offendit in uerbo in nullo offendit, quia si offendit in alio, prius offendit in uerbo quod est illius operis principium. [cf. Iac. 3.2]

16 Ne igitur offendas in uerbo, "pone custodiam ori tuo, et ostium circumstancie labiis tuis," [Ps. 140.3] et sicut monet sapiens in Ecclesiastico: "Ori tuo facito ostium et seras ipsum." [Eccus. 28.28] Verbum autem interius, de thalamo memorie procedens, [cf. Ps. 18.6] quasi uehiculum uerbi sonantis ascendit, et progreditur per cauum oris quasi per ostii aperturam, cuius ostii ualue sunt instrumenta uocalia. Inter quod ostium et dictum thalamum quasi deductrix quedam sedet circumspeccio prudens que omne uerbum uolens egredi prudenter et uigilanter considerat an ipsum sit amictum ueritatis lumine ut possit aspectum mentis, ad quam uult progredi, illuminare, et an sit effectiue rectum et uiuax ut possit affectum rectificare et uiuificare. Et si uiderit illud tale, deducit illud ad ostiarium ut ei aperiat. Ubi autem uiderit illud non tale, clamat ostiario ut ei claudat.

17 Est autem ostiarius aperiens amor illuminandi aspectum et accendendi affectum mentis aliene. Ostiarius uero claudens est odium contrarii. Value ostii clause sunt instrumenta uocalia in quiete a motu formante uocem significatiuam. Eedem aperte sunt eadem instrumenta in motu formante uocem significatiuam, quas ualuas aperit ostiarius cum imperat uirtuti motiue ut moueat ad uocis significantis formacionem; claudit uero cum imperat quietem a tali mocione.

Proverbs chapter thirteen: "He who guards his mouth guards his soul," [Prov. 13.3] in which "he who offends not <in word> is perfect," [Iac. 3.2] as James says in chapter three. And in Proverbs fourteen: "He who guards his tongue is most wise." [Prov. 10.19] And Ecclesiasticus: "Blessed is the man who has not fallen by a word from his mouth." [Eccus. 14.1] And since the noun "word" combines the interior with the exterior word, and the interior word is the origin of every work, it is evident that he who offends not in word offends not, because if he were to offend at all, he must first offend in the word which is the origin of that work. [cf. Iac. 3.2]

16 Lest therefore you should offend in word, "place a guard at your mouth and a door round about your lips," [Ps. 140.3] and as Wisdom admonishes in Ecclesiasticus: "Make a door to your mouth and bolt it" [Eccus. 28.28]. The interior word, issuing forth from the treasury of the memory [cf. Ps. 18.6] as if it were the vehicle of the spoken word, rises and advances through the cavity of the mouth as if through the opening of a door, the leaves of which door are the vocal chords. Between that door and the said treasury prudent circumspection sits like a certain attendant, who wisely and vigilantly inspects every word wishing to come out, whether it is itself clothed in the light of truth so that it may illumine the gaze of the mind, to which it wishes to go forth, and whether it is effectively upright and vital, so that it may rectify and vivify the affection of the mind. And if wise circumspection sees that it is such, she will escort it to the door-keeper, that he may open the door for it. But if she sees that the word is not thus, she calls to the door-keeper that he is to shut the door.

17 The door-keeper opening the door is the love of illumining the gaze and inflaming the affection of another mind; the door-keeper shutting the door is the hatred of the contrary. The leaves of the door when shut are the vocal chords at rest from the motion which shapes the signifying word. The same leaves of the door when open are the same vocal chords in motion shaping the signifying word, which leaves the door-keeper opens when wise circumspection commands the motive power so that it might move to the shaping of the signifying word; but he shuts the leaves of the door when she orders rest from such a motion.

## Commentary: a source for scribal technology

There are few presentations of the sequence for turning a feather into a writing quill which ante-date the sixteenth century.[1] Contemporary with Dürer's engraving of Erasmus of Rotterdam using a reed pen (*calamus*)[2] is the regular appearance of instructions for quill cutting, both in handbooks on the scribal art as well as in works intended for elementary education.[3] Among earlier descriptions of the making of quill pens are some lines by Conrad de Mure (ca. 1210–1281),[4] and an anonymous fifteenth-century *Regulae de modo scindendi pennarum*.[5] Grosseteste's Dictum 54 predates these.

[1] Cf. Stanley Morrison, who writes "rules regarding the correct cutting of the quill... are not infrequent, especially in metrical form," yet cites only two late examples; Stanley Morrison et al., *A Fifteenth-Century Modus scribendi from the Abbey of Melk* (Cambridge, 1940), p. xix.

[2] Dated 1526; Walter L. Strauss, *Albrecht Dürer*, The Illustrated Bartsch, Sixteenth Century German Artists, vol. 10 (formerly vol. 7, pt. 1) (New York, 1980), no. 107, p. 44, and vol. 10 (Commentary) (New York, 1981), no. 1001.107, pp. 238–40. Was this a conscious humanist revival of an ancient practice, or a continuation of a medieval one? See the discussion at the end of the section on "Sequence of pen cutting" below, p. 133.

[3] Ludovico [Arrighi] Vincentino, *Il modo de temperare le penne*...(Rome, 1523), facsimile in *Three Classics of Italian Calligraphy: an Unabridged Reissue of the Writing Books of Arrighi, Tagliente, and Palatino*, ed. Oscar Ogg (s.l., 1953), pp. 35–42; section on "Modo di temperare la penna" in Giovanniantonio Tagliente, *Opera* (Venice, 1530), in *Classics*, ed. Ogg, pp. 103–7; section on "Del temprare delle penne" in Giovam Battista Palatino, *Libro... nelqual s'insegna à scriver ogni forte lettera*... (Rome, 1541), in *Classics*, ed. Ogg, pp. 242–44; Ioannes Ludovicus Vives Valentinus, *Linguae latinae exercitatio*... (Paris, 1540), dialogue "Scriptio," pp. 36–45, at 40.

[4] "Concavus hic et fissus erit, percissus, acutus, /Dexter pes brevior, latior alter erit" ("The quill should be hollowed out and split, cut-off, made keen, /The right foot should be shorter, and the other foot longer [i.e., the nib should be given an oblique cut.]"); Wilhelm Wattenbach, *Das Schriftwesen im Mittelalters* (Leipzig, 1896[3]), p. 230.

[5] "Prima, quod prima scissura debet transire ad medium penne.
Secunda, quod rostrum debet habere dimiditatem longitudinis penne scissure.
Tertia, quod ab una parte debet esse ita lata sic ab alia.
Quarta, quod scissure debent esse equales.
Quinta, quod non debet directe incidi sed oblique.
Sexta, quod scissura debet habere dimiditatem tocius rostri.
Septima, quod non debet acuari directe sed oblique.
Octura [emended from "Octrua" in Bech], quod debet in dorso perspicilitea [?] incidi.
Nona, rostrum debet intrare ad lineam penne
(First, that the first cut ought to cross over the middle of the pen.
Second, that the breadth of the beak ought to be equivalent to half the length of the cut across the middle of the pen.
Third, that the breadth of the beak of the pen ought to be equal at all points.

The Oxford theologian hardly intended his dictum to be a "Method for the Preparation of Pens"; rather, it is directed to the preparation of people. As with his similar writings, the comparison of worldly things and worldly human actions with spiritual things and properly directed human actions, and the contrasts and lessons drawn through such metaphors, rely on the accuracy with which the worldly things and human actions are drawn. Put simply, if the mundane equipment, actions, and circumstances lack verisimilitude, the moral comparisons lose their force. It is this casual, occasional, and factual (if incomplete) depiction of the reality of the everyday that can make medieval works on spiritual formation valuable – if unintended – sources for medieval technology.

More important than mining a vein of technological information from this text is to read about the tools as they are actually embedded in the context of Dictum 54; in other words, to try to understand what Grosseteste meant when he wrote about objects as seemingly trivial as the tools of the scribe. There is a neat fitness to building a metaphor of spiritual direction around the pen, a tool essential to the work and identity of students and scholars.[6] The question is, did those to whom this dictum is addressed think about their pens in quite this way? It is hard to imagine they did not.

The tradition of a "mystical" reading of writing tools had some history when Grosseteste wrote, going back at least to the fourth century, with

Fourth, that the cuts used to fashion the pen ought to be equal on either side of the beak.

Fifth, that the end of the beak of the pen ought to be cut obliquely, not cut straight across.

Sixth, that the slit [?] ought to be half the length of the beak.

Seventh, that the finishing cut to make the pen keen ought to be oblique, rather than straight.

Eighth, that the pen ought to be cut through the barbs on the back.

Ninth, that the beak ought to be "in-line" with the body of the pen"); Fedor Bech, "Regulae de modo scindendi pennarum," *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 8 (1877), 348.

[6] According to John of Garland (ca. 1195–post ca. 1272): "Hec sunt instrumenta clericis necessaria... penna... [These are the tools necessary for clerics... a pen...]"; A. Scheler, "Johannis de Garlandia dictionarius," in "Trois traités de lexicographie latine du XIIe et du XIIIe siècle," *Jahrbuch für romanische und englische Literatur* 7 (1866), 141–62, at p. 155; Tony Hunt, *Teaching and Learning Latin in Thirteenth-Century England,* 3 vols. (Woodbridge, and Rochester, 1991), 1:191–203, at p. 200. In light of the book production imagery of Dictum 54 it is amusing to note the poor opinion of the scribal abilities of his Franciscan confrères held by Grosseteste's follower Roger Bacon; Richard H. and Mary A. Rouse, *Illiterati et uxorati. Manuscripts and Their Makers: Commercial Book Producers in Medieval Paris, 1200–1500,* vol. 1 (Turnhout, 2000), p. 350, n. 114.

authors such as Zeno of Verona (d. ca. 371), Ambrose, and Jerome.[7] A sketch of that commentary tradition would be out of place here, but it should be said that many latter writers repeated the exegeses of the fourth century, while some few, such as Paschasius Radbertus (ca. 790–ca. 860) and Innocent III, developed the material further.[8] Mynors reports on a twelfth-century sermon in a manuscript at Durham which uses the imagery of writing tools in an apparently simpler fashion than does Grosseteste in Dictum 54 – but the anonymous Durham work mentions more tools.[9] Caesarius of Heisterbach (ca. 1180–1240) compares a book, its preparation and binding, to the torments of Christ, and the instruments of the Passion.[10] Hugh of St. Cher, o.p. (d. 1263) includes both an extended moral interpretation of the steps in the preparation of parchment, and a similar treatment of the characteristics desirable for a pen, in a long postil on Ps. 44.2.[11]

The key texts framed by mystical interpretations of writing tools are that very psalm verse, Ps. 44.2, and Matt. 13.52, Ex. 31.18, and 2 Cor. 3.3 (and sometimes verses 2, and 6–7). It is no surprise that these biblical texts often travelled together, although few commentators went so far as to interweave all of them into a single exposition (e.g. Paschasius uses Ps. 44.2, Matt. 13.52, and Ex. 31.18). Most commence with Ps. 44.2, as does Grosseteste, who then incorporates Ex. 31.18 and 2 Cor. 3. Aspects of Grosseteste's mystical interpretation of writing tools can be found in earlier

[7] For Zeno of Verona, see "Tractatus de somnio Iacob," in *Zenonis veronensis tractatus*, lib. 1, no. 37, ed. B. Löfstedt, CCSL, vol. 22 (Turnhout, 1971), pp. 101–4, at 101–2; for Ambrose, see *Sancti Ambrosii mediolanensis opera. Expositio evangeli secundum Lucam*, lib. 5, ed. M. Adriaen, CCSL, vol. 14, pars 4 (Turnhout, 1957), pp. 169–70; and for Jerome, see Evaristo Arns, *La technique du livre d'après saint Jérôme* (Paris, 1953), pp. 32, 35.

[8] For Paschasius, see "Expositio in psalmum XLIV eructavit cor meum... ad sacras virgines suessione in s. Mariae monasterio degentes. Liber secundus," in PL 120:1022D-23C; for Innocent III, see "Sermones de diversis. Sermo VI in concilio generali lateranensi habitus," in PL 217:676D-77A.

[9] R.A.B. Mynors, *Durham Cathedral Manuscripts to the End of the Twelfth Century* (Oxford, 1939), p. 9. The work appears on fol. 37r of MS B. IV. 12 (no. 59). Mynors provides a partial translation, but omits the Latin text.

[10] Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus miraculorum*, ed. Joseph Strange, vol. 2 (Cologne, Bonn, and Brussels, 1851), cap. 25 ("De passione Christi"), pp. 108–9. Wattenbach, *Schriftwessen* (as in note 4), p. 209, provides an extract from a work by a fourteenth-century archbishop of Prague comparing the Virgin to the Book of Life using the metaphor of stages in the production of a book (the metaphor also alludes to Christ's Passion).

[11] *Hugonis cardinalis opera omnia in universum vetus, et novum testamentum tomi octo...* (Venice, 1732), vol. 2, fols. 115v–116r.

works. Ambrose in his commentary on Luke says that when one selects a reed and removes its superfluous parts, the reed begins to be a pen to inscribe the precepts of divine scripture on the tablets of the heart, and in taking these actions one begins to remove the superfluous parts from one's self.[12] Paschasius contrasts the mortal pen and ink to the grace of the Holy Spirit, the pen of the Father (Christ is the scribe).[13] This parallels the dictum's contrast of the "pure pen" with the "pen of worldly excess," and, less obviously, the "dead skin" with the "live mind." An anonymous sermon for the commemoration of St. Augustine presents the stages in the manufacture of parchment, among which is the scraping of the parchment through the removal of all carnality, similar to, though less developed, than the dictum's "razor of the fear of the punishment of Gehenna abrading the mind."[14] Hugh of St. Cher writes that the pen ought to be made hollow through humility, as does Grosseteste.[15] Few if any of the many mystical interpretations of scribal tools and procedures are as cohesive, inventive, or as extended as those used and developed by Grosseteste. The entire text of Dictum 54 is about communicating texts rightly conceived, directed, and uttered; everything illuminates some aspect of the opening sentence.

Among the images apparently original to Grosseteste are the double threefold trimming of the pen, and the pumice as an image of Christ and the wounds of the Passion. The last may have occurred to Grosseteste through the commentary tradition on Ct. 2.14 ("columba mea in foraminibus petrae, in caverna maceriae"), comparing the holes in the rock to the wounds from the crucifixion, and the hollow in the wall to the wound in Christ's side.[16] Grosseteste's metaphorical pumice is an inspired development, a rock with an instrumental dimension, for this pumice effects the right receptivity of the reader's mind.

The mystical interpretation of writing tools (writing tools as symbols) is an aspect of manuscript culture, and of the archaeology of scribal tools in particular, which deserves more attention than it has received.

[12] As in n. 7.

[13] As in n. 8.

[14] "Sermo XCIX. In festo sancti Augustini" of the "Sermones centum," in the "Appendix ad Hugonis opera mystica," PL 177:1205D.

[15] *Hugonis cardinalis opera omnia* (as in n. 11), 2, fol. 116r.

[16] E.g. Pseudo-Isidore (saec. IX, or later), "Expositio in canticum canticorum Salomoni," in PL 83:1121C; Pseudo-Gregory I (Robertus de Tumbalenia, saec. XI), "Super cantica canticorum expositio," in PL 79:499D; Pseudo-Anselm, "Liber meditationum et orationum. Meditatio XV," in PL 158:791C.

**Sequence of pen cutting**

1. The pen is hollowed out (i.e. pith taken from interior, but probably also embraces the first cut which opens the quill for the pith to be extracted) (¶1);

2. trimmed on the right, perhaps with three motions of the pen (¶1);

3. trimmed on the left part, perhaps with three motions of the pen (¶1);

4. carefully split (i.e. split in nib formed) (¶1);

5. the tip is shortened (¶1);

6. the nib is given its final point, forming, or sharpening (¶1);

7. the barbs are removed (¶7).

The sequence outlined here is perfectly reasonable. It differs from the method used by one of the present authors in only two respects: Grosseteste (in common with other medieval sources) does not mention the removal of the outer membrane from the barrel; and Grosseteste's step 7 is the present author's step 1. There is, however, no practical reason to perform that action first. It is interesting that Grosseteste's sequence is not too far from that used by Edward Johnston.[17] It is at greater variance, however, with instructions given by other modern authors.[18] Of surely greater significance than the degree of conformity of Grosseteste's sequence to modern practice is its broad concord with later medieval instructions.[19] On the basis of this approximate agreement one could perhaps even speak of a common thirteenth-fifteenth century technique for cutting quills.

[17] Edward Johnston, *Writing & Illuminating, and Lettering* (London and New York, 1980; essentially reprint of London, 1906), pp. 424–25 (1933 supplement to 1906 instructions); 17–25. Johnston's directions are, naturally, more circumstantial than those of Grosseteste.

[18] Donald Jackson, "Preparation of Quills and Reeds," in *The Calligrapher's Handbook*, ed. Heather Child (New York, 1986$^2$), pp. 15–36.

[19] Evident from comparing them to Conrad de Mure's instructions (as in n. 4), and to the "Regulae de modo scindendi pennarum" (as in n. 5).

It is possible that Grosseteste's presentation of these steps is not meant to be strictly sequential. The number of twice three "motions" or cuts in the trimming (steps 2–3) may be entirely symbolic, or it may be a coincidence of the symbolic with the practical.

The mention of the removal of barbs indicates that Grosseteste speaks of pens, *calami*, made from feathers, that is, quills. This is in contrast to Hugh of St. Cher's discussion, which, specifying that the pen "ought to grow in the water of doctrine," and "be gathered at a suitable time given the use to which it will be put," strongly implies that his *calamus* is indeed to be understood in its literal sense, as a reed pen.[20] The significance of both writers' words for the chronology of the use of quills and reeds for pens in thirteenth-century western Europe has yet to be assessed.

**Nomenclature of features, characteristics, and techniques**

1. act of hollowing out the pen (¶1): *cavere*;[21]

2. act of trimming the pen (¶1): *circumcidere*;

3. act of splitting the nib (¶1; 3): *findere*;[22]

4. act of shortening the nib (¶1; 4): *incurtare*;

5. act of finishing the nib (¶1; 11): *subtiliare*;[23]

6. sharp edge trimming pen, i.e. pen-knife (¶2): *acies calamum circumcidens*;

7. movement of pen on the writing support (¶7; 11): *discurro*;

8. nib (¶1; 6; 11): *bilinguis*;[24]

[20] *Hugonis cardinalis opera omnia* (as in n. 11), 2, fol. 116r.

[21] Hugh uses the formulation *debet esse vacuus* (as in n. 20).

[22] Zeno of Verona uses the same term, *calamus fissus est* (as in n. 7); Hugh of St. Cher prefers *scindere* (as in n. 20). Ausonius (ca. 310–post 394), although he does not refer directly to the act of splitting a nib, does use the relatively rare *fissipes* (lit. "cloven-hoofed") to refer to the split nib of a reed pen; *The Works of Ausonius*, *Ep.* 14, line 49, ed. R.P.H. Green (Oxford, 1991), p. 213. Vives, more than a millennium after Ausonius, preferred *bifurcata* (as in n. 24).

[23] *Debet acui per subtilitatem* in Hugh (as in n. 20).

9. tine of the nib (implied by the use of *bilinguis*): *lingua*;[25]

10. barbs (¶7): *pili*;[26]

11. desired rigidity (¶1): *rigidus, -a, -um*;[27] (¶6): *rigor*;

12. undesirable softness (¶1; 6; 11): *nimis mollis*;

13. undesirable length of nib (¶1; 4; 11): *prolixitas*;

14. undisciplined speed in writing: *nimis precipitanter/precipitata velocitas* (¶7, 11);[28]

15. razor for preparation of text support (¶10): *novacula* (*id abradat*);[29]

[24] Termed the "pwynt of a penne" in the Bodleian's copy of the fifteenth-century author Nicholas Munshull's *Nominale* (MS Bodley 604), as published by the late Jeremy Griffiths, "Book Production Terms in Nicholas Munshull's *Nominale*," in *Art into Life: Collected Papers from the Kresge Art Museum Medieval Symposia*, ed. Carol Garrett Fisher and Kathleen L. Scott (East Lansing, 1995), pp. 49–71, at 70; termed *acumen* (point) by Zeno of Verona (as in n. 7); *rostrum* (beak), in the "Regulae de modo scindendi pennarum" (as in n. 5), and in the Melk *Modus scribendi* (as in n. 1), p. 26; *crena* (notch), which is split in two *bifurcata*, in Vives (as in n. 3); *punta* (tip) by Arrighi (as in n. 3), p. 38, Tagliente (as in n. 3), p. 104, and Palatino (as in n. 3), p. 243. Arrighi (p. 40) and Palatino use *becco* (beak) for a comparison, but prefer *punta* as a term. It seems that "point" can refer to the very end of the nib in contact with the writing surface, as well as to the whole nib.

[25] Termed *vertex* (top) by Zeno of Verona (as in n. 7); *pes* by Conrad de Mure (as in n. 4); *pedunculi* (small feet) or *cruscula* (legs) by Vives (as in n. 3). The use of *pes* to indicate "tine" is clearly implied in Ausonius's use of *fissipes* for the split nib (as in n. 22).

[26] Termed *spicualiteum* (?) in "Regulae de modo scindendi pennarum" (as in n. 5). In the context of book and document production *pili* more usually refers to the hairs which must be removed from skins in the manufacture of parchment; *Hugonis cardinalis opera omnia* (as in n. 11), vol. 2, fol. 116r; Wattenbach, *Schriftwesen* (as in n. 4), pp. 208, 210. Grosseteste may in fact specifically intend the very downy small barbs nearest the nib.

[27] Termed *dura* by Ælfric Bata (late tenth- early eleventh century): *Latin Colloquies from Pre-Conquest Britain*, ed. Scott Gwara, Toronto Medieval Latin Texts 22 (Toronto, 1996), Colloquy 14, pp. 56–60, at 57; *Anglo-Saxon Conversations: The Colloquies of Ælfric Bata*, ed. Scott Gwara, trans David W. Porter (Woodbridge, 1997), pp. 110–17, at 112–13; also *dura* by Arrighi (as in n. 3), p. 38, Tagliente (as in n. 3), p. 104, and Palatino (as in n. 3), p. 238.

[28] Sixteenth-century writing masters make mention of technical features of quills which will ensure speed in writing – presumably disciplined speed; Tagliente (as in n. 3), pp. 103–4, and Palatino (as in n. 3), p. 238.

16. pitted stone for smoothing, i.e. pumice (¶10): *lapis cavernosus* (*planat attricione*).[30]

Ordinary, unexceptional words are pressed into service by Grosseteste to describe the tools, their features, and techniques. This contributes to the clarity of the exposition. Particularly notable are the references to the nib (8), and, by implication, to the tines of the nib (9), to the splitting of a nib (3), and to the barbs (10), features rarely specifically referred to at this date. As well, the mention of desirable (11) and undesirable (12–13) characteristics of a pen are equally rare for this period.

It is notable that in two instances Grosseteste bypasses common technical terms in favour of more vivid metonymic and synecdochic constructions. There is good didactic reason in this. Rather than refer to the "pen-knife" simply as "pen-knife" (*scalpellum*, *artavus*, or *cultellus*),[31] he refers to it by the part which does the cutting, the "sharp edge," to bring home to his reader that he must cut away undesirable traits in thought and speech for the health of his soul. Likewise, with pumice, rather than call it "pumice" (*pumex*),[32] he precisely refers to the mineral through one of its most obvious physical characteristics, its open cellular structure. The open cells recall the open wounds of Christ, the recollection of which prepares the mind of Grosseteste's reader to receive the highest truth, an analogy with the pumice used on parchment so that it can take ink. In this case, though, it is "by the finger of God" writing "on the fleshly tablets of the heart" (¶10). The use of mixed metaphors is a common feature of scriptural commentaries and

[29] The term is used with this meaning by Prior Guigo I of the Grande Chartreuse (1109–1136), as well as by Nequam (1157–1217); Guigues I[er], Prieur de Chartreuse, *Coutumes de Chartreuse*, ed. par un chartreux (= †Dom Maurice Laporte, ord. cart.), Sources Chrétiennes 313, série des textes monastiques d'occident 52 (Paris, 1984), p. 222; Scheler, "Alexanderi Neckam de nominibus utensilium," in "Trois traités" (as in n. 6), 58–74, 155–73, at p. 167; Hunt, *Teaching and Learning Latin* (as in n. 6), 1, pp. 177–90, at 188.

[30] "Pumicem habeat mordacem et planulam ad purgandum et equandum superficiem pergameni ("Let the scribe also have abrasive pumice and a small 'plane' [razor?] for making the surface of the parchment level and smooth"); Scheler, "Neckam" (as in n. 29); Hunt, *Teaching and Learning Latin* (as in n. 29). Nequam's text as used here is that established by Scheler; Hunt's edition varies slightly in the syntax of the passage.

[31] *Scalpellum*: Guigo (as in n. 29); *artavus*: Scheler, "Neckam" (as in n. 29), 168; Hunt, *Teaching and Learning Latin* (as in n. 29), p. 189; *cultellus*: pseudo Garland, "Sacerdos ad altare" (now attributed to Nequam), in Wattenbach, *Schriftwesen* (as in n. 4), p. 230 (the appropriate gloss is not reproduced by Hunt in his edition, *Teaching and Learning Latin*, 1:250–86, at p. 272).

[32] Guigo (as in n. 29); Nequam (as in n. 29); Garland (as in n. 6).

works of spiritual direction; here the intent is to aid the reader's understanding of something which cannot really be understood simply through observing material things. In avoiding the obvious terms "pen-knife" and "pumice," Grosseteste's lesson is more vivid and memorable.

It is faintly possible that the passage describing "letters as are swollen with pride, livid [blue?] with envy, flaming [red?] with anger, dirtied with impurity, discoloured and defiled in some perverse affection" (¶12) may be meant to evoke illuminated letters and *littere notabiliores* of various grades. There may even be a distant echo here of Jerome's outbursts against luxury in manuscripts.[33]

**Qualities of the pen**

1. nib ought not to be too long (¶1; 4; 11);

2. must be sufficiently rigid for the tines of the nib not to twist (i.e. not to deform in use) (¶1; 6; 11); it must not be too soft (¶1; 6; 11).

These may be compared to the qualities for a pen specified by Hugh of St. Cher, among which are the requirements that the reed should be neither too slender nor too thick, that it should be grown in water and harvested at the right time, that it should be hollowed out and plain on the exterior, and that it should be made sharp and have a cleanly formed slit.[34]

**Handling of the pen**

1. the pen should not be moved quickly enough to mar the work (¶7; 11);

This probably refers more to composition than to copying, for Iac. 1.19 implies that speech (i.e. writing/composition) should not follow immediately upon alert listening, but sufficient reflection should intervene.

**The tongue and the formation of human speech**

In paragraphs 14 to 17 Grosseteste shifts his attention from the pen and the hand of the scribe to the tongue and the formation of human speech.

[33] Arns, *La Technique* (as in n. 7), p. 26.
[34] *Hugonis cardinalis opera omnia* (as in n. 11), vol. 2, fol. 116r.

1. The movement of the tongue in speech takes its origin in the inmost recesses of the mind of the speaker, and its words penetrate to the further inmost recesses of the mind, inscribing internal words on the soul (¶ 14);

2. The interior word in us makes us an image of God, and when that word is uttered externally it is like the Incarnation of God (¶ 15);

3. All human acts, whether internal or external, have their origins in an internal "word" or thought (¶ 15);

4. The internal word comes forth from the storehouse of memory, and passes through the oral cavity as through a doorway into the external world. It is given external shape by the vocal instruments, (ie. the vocal chords, but doubtless also implying the tongue, lips, palate, and teeth) (¶ 16);

5. A gatekeeper, prudent circumspection, ought to be posted at the doorway, to consider each internal word, and to allow only appropriate ones to be formed by the vocal apparatus. When the vocal instruments are producing meaningful speech the doors of speech are said to be "open"; when the vocal instruments are at rest, the doors are said to be "closed" (¶ 16; 17).

The understanding of the formation of human speech as an image of God in man (2) is indebted, no doubt, to Grosseteste's careful reading of Augustine's *De Trinitate*, especially Books 8–9 and 14–15, and the *Confessiones*, Books 10 and 11. The sources of the physiology and psychology of speech (4–5) are more recent. According to contemporary medical literature known to Grosseteste, speech arises when air or breath (*spiritus*) travels to the lower parts of the body and stirs up the vital spirit (*spiritus vitalis*) and in doing so moves the heart and lungs; when an image or conception (*imaginatio*) is introduced into the imaginative part of the brain (*fantastica cellula*) it moves the brain (*cerebrum*). Speech (*vox*) is formed from these movements of the brain and lungs by the plectrum of the tongue (*plectrum lingue*).[35] Grosseteste concentrates here on the final part of

[35] "*Quaeritur quare quidam dormiendo loquuntur*? R. Ad hoc ut fiat sompnus oportet nervos opilari per quos spiritus ad instrumenta sensus transcurrit. Si ergo contingat nervos non ex toto opilari, spiritus transcurrit ad inferiora unde movet spiritum vitalem, quo moto movetur et cor et pulmo, et dum imaginatio inducitur in fantastica cellula, movet cerebrum. Ex motu itaque cerebri et pulmonis vox formatur in plectro lingue, unde postea fit vox, et huius vocis sonus insuavis est."; *The Prose Salernitan Questions: An Anonymous Collection dealing with Science and Medicine written by an Englishman c. 1200*, ed. Brian Lawn,

the action. He imagines the oral cavity (*cauum oris*) as the doorway between the internal and the external world. The leaves of the doorway (*ualue*) are the vocal instruments (*instrumenta uocalia*). The medical literature of the time concentrates on the role of the tongue as the instrument, specifically the plectrum (*plectrum lingue*) that forms speech.[36] It might be thought that, in addition to its use as a pen, the quill would be familiar to Grosseteste's readers and auditors as the plectrum used with plucked chordaphones of the period, such as the psaltery or citole, and that the awareness of these uses of the quill would be evoked by the common medical image of the plectrum of the tongue, providing an effective bridge from the beginning section on the pen to the concluding section on the tongue and the formation of human speech. It would, however, be unwise to affirm this at present for two reasons. One is that the use of the quill as a plectrum cannot be established as a common practice in England during the first half of the thirteenth century.[37] The other, and more important reason is that Grosseteste's interest here is not in the tongue as an instrument of meaningful communication, but rather in the guarding of speech: "Place a guard at your mouth and a door round about your lips" (¶ 16). The doors of speech are found in the mouth – the oral cavity. We know something of what Grosseteste would have imagined to constitute the "vocal apparatus" from his *Tabula*, a topical index and referencing system he developed at about the same time as he was lecturing to the Franciscans. In the ninth distinction of that work, *De anima et uirtutibus eius*, he lists as topics for consideration: the mouth, the tongue,

Auctores Britannici Medii Aevi 5 (London, 1979), §B.37, pp. 19–20. On Grosseteste's scientific and medical knowledge, see Southern, *Robert Grosseteste* (as at p. 114, n. 1 supra), pp. 65–107.

[36] See *Prose Salernitan Questions* (as in n. 35), pp. 19–20 (B.37), 24 (B.50), 118 (B.235).

[37] Reliable textual evidence from elsewhere in Europe first appears during the century following Grosseteste's activity. Book one of the vast *Speculum musicae* of Jacques of Liège (ca. 1260–post 1330) seems to be one of the earliest sources in the Latin West to mention plectra made from quills; *Jacobi Leodiensis Speculum musicae*, ed. Roger Bragard, Corpus scriptorum de musica, 3.1 (Rome, 1955), pp. 70–71. Most saec. XIII/1 English depictions of psalteries and citoles are not detailed enough to reveal that a plectrum is manufactured from a quill, rather than from some other hard material (nor can English images of lutes be used, as non apparently antedate saec. XIV/1; Matthew Spring, *The Lute in Britain: a History of the Instrument and Its Music*, Oxford Early Music Series (Oxford, 2001), pp. 19–20)); yet evidence may eventually be found for the wide-spread use of quill plectra in Grosseteste's England.

the palate, the teeth, and the lips.[38] All of these, it would seem, constitute the "vocal apparatus" that give external shape to the internal word (¶ 16).

The guardian of speech is seated somewhere between the "storehouse of memory" and the oral cavity. She is called "prudent circumspection" (*circumspeccio prudens*), and her task is to examine all the words that wish to pass through the doors of speech. She judges them on the basis of the light with which they are clothed. If they are dressed in the light of truth and are thus capable of illuminating the gaze of the mind (*aspectus mentis*) of the intended recipient, and they are upright and life-giving, and thus appropriate to the will or desire (*affectus*), she tells the doorkeeper to open the doors of speech; if not, she calls to the doorkeeper to close the doors (¶ 16–17). The notion that sounds are "dressed in light" may be only a metaphor, but it fits nicely with Grosseteste's scientific understanding of the nature of sound as embodied light. Richard Southern explains:

> Grosseteste's explanation [of Aristotle's comment that echoes, rainbows, and reflected images have something in common] is very extraordinary. He says that sound is also an effect of light – not of light falling on a surface, but of light which is imprisoned in pockets of rarefied air within all corporeal bodies. ... Grosseteste seems here almost to be touching the fringe of a modern view of matter.[39]

That these words should be evaluated in terms of their suitability for human understanding (*aspectus mentis*) and human willing or loving (*affectus*) is also a typically Grossetestian formulation.[40]

[38] "De ore; De lingua; De palato; De dentibus; De labiis," *Tabula*, ed. Philipp W. Rosemann, in *Opera Roperti Grosseteste Lincolniensis* 1, CCCM 130 (Turnhout, 1995), pp. 233–320, at 262. On the *Tabula* as a source for Grosseteste's reading, see Southern, *Robert Grosseteste* (as at p. 114, n. 1 supra), pp. 186–98.

[39] Southern, *Robert Grosseteste* (as at p. 114, n. 1 supra), pp. 157–58. See Cecilia Panti, "Robert Grosseteste's Theory of Sound," in *Musik und die Geschichte der Philosophie und Naturwissenschaften im Mittelalter*, ed. Frank Hentschel (Leiden, 1998), pp. 3–17; eadem, "L'incorporazione della luce secondo Roberto Grossatesta," *Medioevo e Rinascimento* 13 (1999), 45–102.

[40] See McEvoy, *Philosophy of Robert Grosseteste* (as at p. 114, n. 1 supra), pp. 107, 134–40, 257–58; Richard W. Southern, "Richard Dales and the Editing of Robert Grosseteste," in *Aspectus et Affectus: Essays and Editions in Grosseteste and Medieval Intellectual Life in Honor of Richard C. Dales*, ed. Gunar Freibergs (New York, 1993), pp. 3–14.

These, in sum, are the kind of "subtle moralities suitable for preaching" that Grosseteste taught the Oxford Franciscans. They were worthy of collecting in his own day, and they became very popular in the following centuries. The nearly-forty manuscript copies of the *Dicta* produced in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries testify eloquently to their success. For the modern reader, they provide not only a window onto the world of preaching and teaching, but also a taste of medieval life as it was experienced and discussed in the schools of thirteenth-century Oxford.

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